

Honorable Larry A. Steele – Juvenile Court Judge

Serving Daggett, Duchesne and Uintah counties



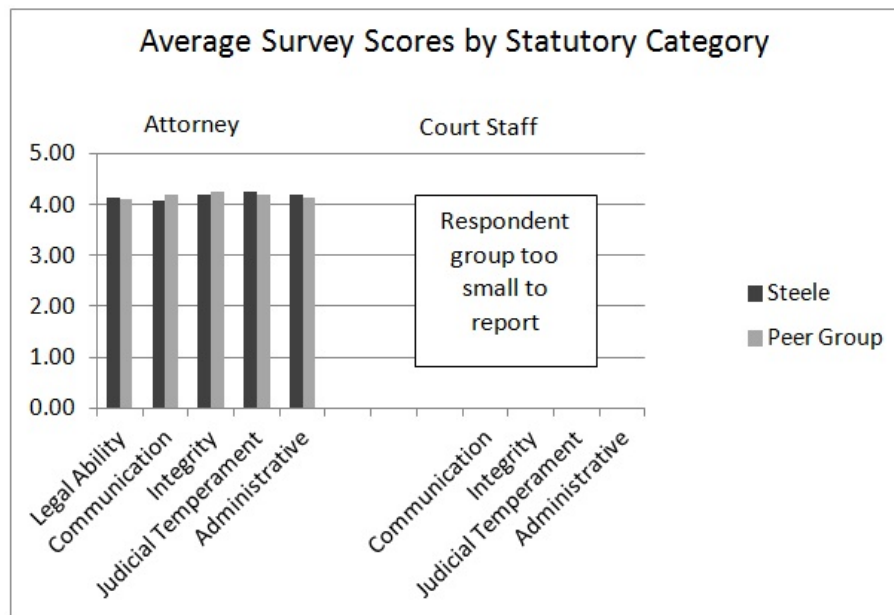
The commission recommends by a vote of 12 - 0
TO RETAIN Judge Larry Steele

Judge Steele is a good judge with many years of experience whose scores are comparable to the average of other juvenile court judges. Attorneys consider his strong points to be treating others with respect and crafting appropriate sentences for delinquent youth. When asked to describe Judge Steele, attorneys most frequently chose the words attentive, patient and polite. Courtroom observers echoed this sentiment in noting that Judge Steele is consistently courteous and works hard to help all participants feel comfortable in his courtroom. They also emphasized that Judge Steele makes every effort to ensure that juveniles and their parents understand the proceedings and that he strives to facilitate positive results for each family. A few attorneys observed that delays are common in Judge Steele's courtroom. Of the 23 attorneys who responded to the retention question, 22 (96%) recommended that Judge Steele be retained.

The commission reviewed surveys and courtroom observation reports in addition to verifying that Judge has met all time standards, judicial education requirements, and discipline standards established by the judicial branch.

Judge Larry A. Steele was appointed to the Eighth District Juvenile Court in October 1996 by Governor Michael O. Leavitt. Judge Steele received his Juris Doctor from Pepperdine University School of Law in 1977. He has taught law-related subjects at Golden Gate University and Cerro Coso College. Judge Steele practiced law for the United States Air Force and for Jones, Waldo, Holbrook & McDonough. He also formed his own firm in Vernal. He currently serves as Presiding Judge of his district as well as a member of the Utah Judicial Council. He previously served as a member and then chair of the Utah Board of Juvenile Court Judges.

This judge has met all minimum performance standards established by law.



Survey Overview

Attorneys and court staff were surveyed about the judge's performance. Survey categories included questions about the judge's legal ability, judicial temperament, integrity, communication skills, and administrative skills. Summarized results for all applicable respondent groups appear below. A judge must score a 3.0 on 80% of the individual questions to pass the minimum performance standard.

A. Attorney Survey Overview:

Total Respondents: 23

1. "Should this judge be retained?"

Response*	Number	Percent of Total
YES	22	96%
NO	1	4%

*0 Respondent(s) did not answer the retention question

2. Statutory Category Scores:

Attorney	Steele	Peer Avg	% of Peer
Legal Ability	4.14	4.09	101%
Communication	4.08	4.20	97%
Integrity	4.21	4.24	99%
Judicial Temperament	4.25	4.21	101%
Administrative	4.19	4.14	101%

3. Average trials before this Judge: 2.91

4. Area of primary practice:

Collections: 0 **Domestic:** 12 **Criminal:** 15 **Civil:** 10 **Other:** 2

B. Court Staff Survey Overview: Respondent group too small to report

Survey Scores

Attorney Survey Scores:

Below are listed: 1) the attorney survey questions; 2) a checkmark to show that the judge met or exceeded the statutory “pass” of 3.0, or an “x” to indicate the judge scored below 3.0 on that question; 3) the judge’s average score on each question; 4) the average score on each question of all judges on the same level of court; and 5) the judge’s average score as a percent of the peer group average score.

A judge must receive an average score of at least 3.0 on 80% of the questions to meet minimum performance standards.

Attorney Question	Statutory Pass: 3.0	Steele	Peer Avg.	% of Peer Avg.
The Judge makes sound rulings.	✓	4.03	4.05	100%
The judge properly applies the rules of civil procedure.	✓	4.18	4.12	101%
The judge properly applies the rules of criminal procedure.	✓	4.19	4.08	103%
The judge properly applies the rules of evidence.	✓	4.15	4.08	102%
The judge's sentencing fits the offenses.	✓	4.21	4.02	105%
The judge makes appropriate findings of facts.	✓	4.08	4.15	98%
The judge appropriately applies the laws to the facts.	✓	4.10	4.09	100%
The judge follows legal precedent.	✓	4.26	4.15	103%
The judge only considers evidence in the record.	✓	4.08	4.06	101%
The judge's written decisions are clear and logical.	✓	4.01	4.20	96%
The judge's written opinions offer meaningful legal analysis.	✓	3.92	4.11	95%
The judge was fair and impartial.	✓	4.12	4.13	100%
The judge avoids impropriety and the appearance of impropriety.	✓	4.28	4.34	99%
The judge avoids improper ex parte communications.	✓	4.14	4.35	95%
The judge's behavior demonstrated equal treatment of all persons or classes of persons.	✓	4.30	4.21	102%
The judge appears to consider both sides of an argument before rendering a decision.	✓	4.19	4.16	101%
The judge holds attorneys accountable for inappropriate conduct.	✓	3.99	4.02	99%
The judge's oral communication while in court is clear and logical.	✓	4.31	4.28	101%
The judge promotes public trust and confidence in the courts through his or her conduct on the bench.	✓	4.30	4.23	102%
The judge respects the time of the participants and understands the personal and financial costs they may be incurring.	✓	4.08	4.01	102%
The judge is prepared for argument and hearings.	✓	4.17	4.36	96%
The judge treats all attorneys with equal courtesy and respect.	✓	4.45	4.22	105%
The judge rules in a timely manner.	✓	4.55	4.41	103%
The judge realistically manages his or her calendar.	✓	3.94	3.98	99%
The judge convened court without undue delay.	✓	4.09	4.03	101%
The judge provides the parties due process; namely, advance notice of issues to be heard an adequate opportunity to prepare and a meaningful opportunity to be heard.	✓	4.37	4.21	104%
The judge acts to ensure that linguistic/cultural differences or disabilities do not unfairly limit access to the justice system.	✓	4.52	4.46	101%

Adjective Summary

Survey respondents were asked to select adjectives that best described the judge. Results are shown from each respondent group. The adjectives highlighted in green are “positive” adjectives, while those in red are “negative.”

L. Steele	
Attorney	
Attentive	19
Calm	15
Confident	9
Considerate	15
Consistent	7
Intelligent	13
Knowledgeable	11
Patient	19
Polite	16
Receptive	11
Arrogant	0
Cantankerous	0
Defensive	1
Dismissive	1
Disrespectful	1
Flippant	0
Impatient	0
Indecisive	3
Rude	0

Positive	135
Negative	6
Positive	96%

REPORT OF COURTROOM OBSERVATIONS FOR JUDGE LARRY STEELE

Five observers wrote 105 codable units that were relevant to 14 of the 17 criteria. Three observers reported that the judge was aware that JPEC observers were present and one reported that the judge was not aware (one did not comment).

Overview

WIDELY AGREED-UPON THEMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All observers were positive about Judge Steele. • All observers reported that Judge Steele's was impeccably courteous, kind and caring, with a casual demeanor in the sense of making all feel comfortable in court. He offered praise, encouragement and concern for each juvenile as well as firm, heart to heart talks and constructive criticism as appropriate. • All observers reported that Judge Steele worked hard to ensure all participants explained their perspectives, was skilled in communicating with juveniles in clear and appropriate language, and clearly explained the law and the reasons for his rulings, especially ensuring that juveniles understood the proceedings and their responsibilities. • Two observers reported that they would feel comfortable appearing before Judge Steele (three did not comment).
MINORITY OBSERVATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
ANOMALOUS COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

<i>Numerical ratings:</i>	<i>Observer 1</i>	<i>Observer 2</i>	<i>Observer 3</i>	<i>Observer 4</i>	<i>Observer 5</i>
Neutrality	5	5	4	5	4
Respect	4	5	5	5	5
Ability to earn trust	5	5	4	5	4
Skill at providing voice	4	5	5	5	4

Summary and *exemplar language* of five observers' comments

<i>RESPECTFUL BEHAVIORS</i>	
Listening & focus	Two observers reported that Judge Steele showed with his <i>facial expression and his body language</i> that he was <i>listening attentively</i> .
Well-prepared & efficient	Two observers reported that Judge Steele was <i>prepared for all hearings</i> , and <i>ran a tight ship</i> . The court was proud of their efficient new "interpreter" machine.
Respect for others' time	Two observers reported that Judge Steel began court on time, <i>worked very hard to stay on schedule</i> , and showed respect for a mother's time when pointing out to a juvenile that <i>his mother has to leave work to come to court for these "silly crimes"</i> .
Respectful behavior generally	Four observers reported that Judge Steele welcomed parties into the courtroom, in one case asking a young woman to pronounce her name saying "That's a pretty name". He <i>acknowledged</i> and <i>thanked</i> participants for their attendance and defendants <i>for their courage</i> , <i>complimented</i> many juveniles for their respectful dress or appearance, for example telling a young man how <i>handsome he looked with his white tie</i> , and <i>praised, congratulated or encouraged</i> every juvenile <i>on their positive achievements</i> , for example praising a girl in a truancy case expected to end soon with a high school graduation by saying "We will play pomp and circumstance here in the court room".

RESPECTFUL TONE

Courtesy, politeness and patience	Three observers reported that Judge Steele was <i>impeccable with his courtesy</i> and <i>went out of his way to make everyone feel comfortable</i> , saying for example “We appreciate you being here today”. He responded positively to a request to bring an <i>apprehensive young boy</i> a day or two before the court date to familiarize him with an empty courtroom, and the judge invited him to his chambers...to make the boy feel at ease.
Courtroom tone & atmosphere	<p>All observers reported that Judge Steele was like a <i>kindly grandfather</i> giving <i>wise and caring counsel</i>, his <i>professionalism was a pleasure to observe</i>, but he also <i>maintained a casualness</i> in his demeanor that <i>made everyone very comfortable</i>. He <i>combined praise with constructive criticism</i>, was both <i>serious and fun when appropriate</i>, for example after bantering with a father <i>who was a real jokester</i> said “Now is the time for you to take this seriously...and have a VERY serious discussion with your son”. He had a “<i>sense</i>” with <i>each juvenile</i> and <i>showed them much compassion and empathy</i> while <i>remaining objective and consistent</i>.</p> <p>Two observers reported that the courtroom was orderly and well organized, and that the separate appearance of each group <i>added a degree of importance</i> that was <i>very respectful</i> without <i>distractions from others</i>. One observer noted an <i>awkward time with each case</i> while the clerk prepared paperwork after a case when Judge Steele said “You may relax and talk among yourselves”.</p>
Body language	Three observers reported that Judge Steele had <i>great eye contact the entire time</i> , and leaned forward as if to make certain that he could hear.

NEUTRALITY

Consistent and equal treatment	Four observers reported that Judge Steele was very consistent with all and showed <i>no favoritism</i> for any juvenile... <i>only after the hearing could one know that he was a friend or acquaintance of the parent in the courtroom</i> . In one case after hearing input from many parties he <i>moved them to the end of the day</i> , <i>obviously weighing everything presented before giving his decision</i> .
Acts with concern for individual needs	Three observers reported that Judge Steele did everything possible to <i>facilitate positive results</i> for each family, for example asking many questions of adoptive parents to ensure they would <i>still love and support the child as a teenager</i> . He helped a school program representative understand the importance of designing “different programs for different kids”.
Expresses concern for the individual	All observers reported that Judge Steele showed concern for the progress of each juvenile, taking many opportunities to <i>give “fatherly” advice</i> or to have <i>heart to heart</i> conversations, for example telling a girl in a foster home “The next time I see you I want you to bring your goals...please work with me on this” and to another “If you don't like what I do to you, stay out of my court room!” He also showed compassion, for example counseling and encouraging at length a nervous young man <i>who was “aging out” of the system</i> , discussing how to overcome the boys <i>fear to move on</i> , and <i>four levels of accountability</i> in his <i>transition to independent living</i> .

VOICE

Considered voice	All observers reported that Judge Steele was careful to ask each participant in turn if they had anything to tell him, and <i>worked very hard to get juveniles to explain their side of the story...ALWAYS looking at the defendant when reading the charges then asking</i> “Tell me what happened” or “I want to hear it in your own words”. With his <i>coaching they usually opened up</i> . He seemed to <i>want to get “buy in” from his juveniles</i> , in one case <i>hoping to get compliance and buy in</i> by telling a boy not in agreement with a payment plan “I'm going to think about it today. If you want to write me a letter you can. Then we'll discuss it at the end of the day”. In one case Judge Steele wanted to ensure a <i>very sick and possibly uninterested mother had a voice in [a] matter</i> by proceeding with the case <i>telephonically from Texas</i> .
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COMMUNICATION

Communicates clearly	Two observers reported that Judge Steele used <i>clear language</i> and <i>changed the conversational tone</i> appropriately for each participant. He had a way to “ <i>get through</i> ” to the kids, and <i>consistently explained “legalese” in plain English</i> in ways juveniles could understand, for example explaining that plea in abeyance means “We put the charge away on a shelf [but] you got into trouble so we're taking it off the shelf and dealing with it now”.
Ensures information understood	Three observers reported that Judge Steele asked each party if they understood what was being discussed and whether there were any questions, and asked juveniles <i>many times if they were understanding the proceedings</i> . He clarified that a father understood the disciplinary, fatherly role he needed to maintain in his home.
Provides adequate explanations	All observers reported that Judge Steele gave <i>clear and transparent explanation of how rules of law were applied</i> and consistently explained the reasons for his decisions. In one case he explained that a jail sentence was <i>not simply to punish</i> but a chance for the defendant <i>to dry out and maximize potential for success in rehab</i> , and in another case explained that a no contact order with a 14 year old girl would ensure the boyfriend would not go to jail “which happens 100% of the time for a young couple involved in fornication”.
